The Land of Broken Promises

A Stirring Story of the Mexican Revolution

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SYNOPSIS.

Bud Hooker and Phil De Lancey are forced, owing to a revolution in Mexico, to give up their mining claim and return to the United States. In the border town of Gadsden Bud meets Henry Kruger, a wealthy miner, who makes him a proposition to return to Mexico to acquire title to a very rich mine which Kruger had blown up when he found he had been cheated out of the title by one Aragon. The Mexican had spent a large sum in an unsuccessful attempt to relocate the vein and then had allowed the land to revert for taxes. Hooker and De Lancey start for the mine.

CHAPTER V.

The journey to Fortuna is a scant fifty miles by measure, but within these eight kilometers there is a lapse of centuries in standards. As Bud and De Lancey rode out of battle-scarred Agua Negra they traveled a good road, well worn by the Mexican wood-wagons that hauled in mesquit from the hills. Then, as they left the town and the wood roads scattered, the highway changed by degrees to a broad trail, dug deep by the feet of pack-animals and marked but lightly with wheels. It followed along the railroad, cutting over hills and down through gulches, and by evening they were in the heart of Old Mexico.

Here were men in sandals and women barefoot; chickens tied up by the legs outside of brush jacales; long-nosed hogs, grunting fiercely as they skirmished for food; and half-naked children, staring like startled rabbits at the strangers.

The smell of garlic and fresh-roasting coffee was in the air as they drew into town for the night, and their room was an adobe chamber with tile floor and iron bars across the windows. Riding south the next day they met vaqueros, mounted on wiry mustangs, who saluted them gravely, taking no shame for their primitive wooden saddle-trees and pommels as broad as soup-plates.

As they left the broad plain and clambered up over the back of a mountain they passed Indian houses, brush-built and thatched with long, coarse grasses, and by the fires the women ground corn on stone metates as their ancestors had done before the fall. For in Mexico there are two peoples, the Spaniards and the natives, and the Indians still remember the days when they were free.

It was through such a land that Phil and Hooker rode on their gallant ponies, leading a pack-animal well loaded with supplies from the north, and as the people gazed from their miserable hovels and saw their outfit they wondered at their wealth.

But if they were moved to envy, the bulk of a heavy pistol, showing through the swell of each coat, discouraged them from going farther; and the cold, searching look of the tall cowboy as he ambled past stayed in their memory long after the pleasant "Adios!" of De Lancey had been forgotten.

Americans were scarce in those days, and what few came by were riding to the north. How bold, then, must this big man be who rode in front—and certainly he had some great reward before him to risk such a horse among the revoltosos! So reasoned the simple-minded natives of the mountains, gazing in admiration at Copper Bottom, and for that look in their eyes Bud returned his forbidding stare.

There is something about a good horse that fascinates the average Mexican—perhaps because they breed the finest themselves and are in a position to judge—but Hooker had developed a romantic attachment for his trim little chestnut mount and he resented their wide-eyed gapings as a lover resents glances at his lady. This, and a frontier education, rendered him short-spoken and gruff with the paisanos and it was left to the cavalier De Lancey to do the courtesies of the road.

As the second day wore on they dipped down into a rocky canyon, with huge cliffs of red and yellow sandstone glowing in the slanting sun, and soon they broke out into a narrow valley, well wooded with sycamores and mesquits and giant hackberry trees.

The shrill toots of a dummy engine came suddenly from down below and a mantle of black smoke rose majestically against the sky—then, at a turn of the trail, they topped the last hill and Fortuna lay before them.

In that one moment they were set back again fifty miles—clear back across the line—for Fortuna was American, from the power-house on the creek bank to the mammoth concentrator on the hill.

All the buildings were of stone, square and uniform. First a central plaza, flanked with offices and warehouses; then behind them barracks and lodging houses and trim cottages in orderly rows; and over across the canyon loomed the huge bulk of the mill and the concentrator with its aerial tramway and endless row of gliding buckets.

Only on the lower hills, where the rough country rock cropped up and nature was at its worst, only there did the real Mexico creep in and assert itself in a crude huddle of half-Indian huts; the dwellings of the care-free natives.

"Well, by Jove!" exclaimed De Lancey, surveying the scene with an appraising eye, "this doesn't look very much like Mexico—or a revolution, either!"

"No, it don't," admitted Bud; "everything running full blast, too. Look at that ore train coming around the hill!"

"Gee, what a burg!" raved Phil; "say, there's some class to this—what? If I mistake not, we'll be able to find a few congenial spirits here to help us spend our money. Talk about a company town! I'll bet you their barroom is full of Americans. There's the corral down below—let's ride by and leave our horses and see what's the price of drinks. They can't feeze me, whatever it is—we doubled our money at the line."

Financially considered, they had done just that—for, for every American dollar in their pockets they could get two that were just as good, except for the picture on the side. This in itself was a great inducement for a ready spender and, finding good company at the Fortuna hotel bar, Phil bought five dollars' worth of drinks, threw down a five-dollar bill, and got back five dollars—Mex.

The proprietor, a large and jovial boniface, pulled off his fiscal miracle with the greatest good humor and then, having invited them to partake of a very exquisite mixture of his own invention, propped himself upon his elbows across the bar and inquired with an ingenuous smile:

"Well, which way are you boys traveling, if I may ask?"

"Oh, down below a ways," answered De Lancey, who always constituted himself the board of strategy. "Just rambling around a little—how's the country around here now?"

"Oh, quiet, quiet!" assured their host. "These Mexicans don't like the cold weather much—they would freeze you know, if it was not for that zarape which they wind about them so!"

He made a motion as of a native

"Which Way Are You Boys Traveling?"

wrapping his entire wardrobe about his neck and smiled, and De Lancey knew that he was no Mexican. And yet that soft "which away" of his betrayed a Spanish tongue.

"Ah, excuse me," he said, taking quick advantage of his guess, "but from the way you pronounce that word 'zarape' I take it that you speak Spanish."

"No one better," replied the host, smiling pleasantly at being taken at his true worth, "since I was born in the city of Burgos, where they speak the true Castilian. It is a different language, believe me, from this bastard Mexican tongue. And do you speak Spanish also?" he inquired, falling back into the staccato of Castile.

"No indeed!" protested De Lancey in a very creditable imitation; "nothing but a little Mexican, to get along with the natives. My friend and I are mining men, passing through the country, and we speak the best we can. How is this district here for work along our line?"

"None better!" cried the Spaniard, shaking his finger emphatically. "It is of the best, and, believe me, my friend, we should be glad to have you stop with us. The country down below is a little dangerous—not now, perhaps, but later, when the warm weather comes on.

"But in Fortuna—no! Here we are on the railroad; the camp is controlled by Americans; and because so many have left the country the Mexicans will sell their prospects cheap.

"Then again, if you develop a mine near by, it will be very easy to sell it—and if you wish to work it, that is easy, too. I am only the proprietor of the hotel, but if you can use my poor services in any way I shall be very happy to please you. A room? One of the best! And if you stay a week or more I will give you the lowest rate."

They passed up the winding stairs and down a long corridor, at the end of which the proprietor showed them into a room, throwing open the outer doors and shutters to let them see the view from the window.

"Here is a little balcony," he said, stepping outside, "where you can sit and look down on the plaza. We have the band and music when the weather is fine, and you can watch the pretty girls from here. But you have been in Mexico—you know all that!" And he gave Phil a roguish dig.

"Bien, my frien', I am glad to meet you—" He held out his hand in welcome and De Lancey gave his in return. "My name," he continued, "is Juan de Dios Brachamonte y Escalon; but with these Americans that does not go, as you say, so in general they call me Don Juan.

"There is something about that name—I do not know—that makes the college boys laugh. Perhaps it is that poet, Byron, who wrote so scandalously about us Spaniards, but certainly he knew nothing of our language, for he rhymes Don Juan with 'new one' and 'true one!' Still, I read part of that poem and it is, in places, very interesting—yes, very interesting—but 'Don Joo-an!' Hah!"

He threw up his hand in despair and De Lancey broke into a jollying laugh.

"Well, Don Juan," he cried, "I'm glad to meet you. My name is Philip De Lancey and my pardner here is Mr. Hooker. Shake hands with him, Don Juan de Dios! But certainly a man so devoutly named could never descend to reading much of Don Joo-an!"

"Ah, no," protested Don Juan, rolling his dark eyes and smiling rakishly, "not moch—only the most in-teresting passages!"

He saluted and disappeared in a roar of laughter, and De Lancey turned triumphantly on his companion, a self-satisfied smile upon his lips.

"Aha!" he said; "you see? That's what five dollars' worth of booze will do in opening up the way. Here's our old friend Don Juan willing, nay, anxious, to help us all he can—he sees I'm a live wire and wants to keep me around. Pretty soon we'll get him feeling good and he'll tell us all he knows. Don't you never try to make me sign the pledge again, brother—a few shots just gets my intellect to working right and I'm crafty as a fox.

"Did you notice that coup I made—asking him if he was a Spaniard? There's nothing in the world makes a Spaniard so mad as to take him for a Mexican—on the other hand, nothing makes him your friend for life like recognizing him for a blue-blooded Castilian. Now maybe our old friend Don Juan has got a few drops of Moorish blood in his veins—to put it politely, but—" he raised his tenor voice and improvised—

"Jest because my hair is curly
Dat's no reason to call me 'shine!'"

"No," agreed Bud, feeling cautiously of the walls, "and jest because you're happy is no reason for singing so loud, neither. These here partitions are made of inch boards, covered with paper—do you get that? Well, then, considering who's probably listening, it strikes me that Mr. Brachamonte is the real thing in Spanish gentleman; and I've heard that all genuine Spaniards have their hair curly, jest like a—huh?"

But De Lancey, made suddenly aware of his indiscretion, was making all kinds of exaggerated signs for silence, and Bud stopped with a slow, good-natured smile.

"S-s-st!" hissed De Lancey, touching his finger to his lips; "don't say it—somebody might hear you!"

"All right," agreed Bud; "and don't you say it, either. I hate to knock, Phil," he added, "but sometimes I think the old man was right when he said you talk too much."

"Psst!" chided De Lancey, shaking his finger like a Mexican. Tiptoeing softly over to Bud, he whispered in his ear: "S-s-st, I can hear the feller in the next room—shaving himself!"

Laughing heartily at this joke, they went down stairs for supper.

CHAPTER VI.

If the Eagle Tail mine had been located in Arizona—or even farther down in Old Mexico—the method of jumping the claim would have been delightfully simple.

The title had lapsed, and the land had reverted to the government—all it needed in Arizona was a new set of monuments, a location notice at the discovery shaft, a pick and shovel thrown into the hole, and a few legal formalities.

But in Mexico it is different. Not that the legal formalities are lacking—far from it—but the whole theory of mines and mining is different. In Mexico a mining title is, in a way, a lease, a concession from the general government giving the concessionnaire the right to work a certain piece of ground and to hold it as long as he pays a mining tax of three dollars an acre pear year.

But no final papers or patents are ever issued, the possession of the surface of the ground does not go with the right to mine beneath it, and in certain parts of Mexico no foreigner can hold title to either mines or land.

A prohibited or frontier zone, eighty kilometers in width, lies along the international boundary line, and in that neutral zone no foreigner can denounce a mining claim and no foreign corporation can acquire a title to one. The Eagle Tail was just inside the zone.

But—there is always a "but" when you go to a good lawyer—while for purposes of war and national safety foreigners are not allowed to hold land along the line, they are at perfect liberty to hold stock in Mexican corporations owning property within the prohibited zone; and—here is where the graft comes in—they may even hold title in their own name if they first obtain express permission from the chief executive of the republic.

Not having any drag with the chief executive, and not caring to risk their title to the whims of succeeding administrations, Hooker and De Lancey, upon the advice of a mining lawyer in Gadsden, had organized themselves into the Eagle Tail Mining company, under the laws of the republic of Mexico, with headquarters at Agua Negra. It was their plan to get some Mexican to locate the mine for them and then, for a consideration, transfer it to the company.

The one weak spot in this scheme was the Mexican. By trusting Aragon, Henry Kruger had not only lost title to his mine, but he had been outlawed from the republic. And now he had

Feeling Cautiously of the Walls.

bestowed upon Hooker and De Lancey the task of finding an honest Mexican, and keeping him honest until he made the transfer.

While the papers were being made out there might be a great many temptations placed before that Mexican—either to keep the property for himself or to hold out for a bigger reward than had been specified. After his experience with the aristocratic Don Cipriano Aragon y Tres Palacios, Kruger was in favor of taking a chance on the lower classes. He had therefore recommended to them one Cruz Mendez, a wood vender whom he had known and befriended, as the man to play the part.

Cruz Mendez, according to Kruger, was hard-working, sober and honest—for a Mexican. He was also simple-minded and easy to handle, and was the particular man who had got word that the Eagle Tail had at last been abandoned. And also he was easy to pick out, being a little, one-eyed man and going by the name of "El Tuerto."

So, in pursuance of their policy of playing a waiting game, Hooker and De Lancy hung around the hotel for several days, listening to the gossip of Don Juan de Dios and watching for one-eyed men with prospects to sell.

In Sonora he is a poor and unimaginative man indeed who has not at least one lost mine or "prospecto" to sell; and prosperous-looking strangers, riding through the country, are often beckoned aside by half-naked paisanos eager to show them the gold mines of the Spanish padres for a hundred dollars Mex.

It was only a matter of time, they thought, until Cruz Mendez would hunt them up and try to sell them the Eagle Tail; and it was their intention reluctantly to close the bargain with him, for a specified sum, and then stake him to the denouncement fees and gain possession of the mine.

As this was a commonplace in the district—no Mexican having capital enough to work a claim and no American having the right to locate one—it was a very natural and inconspicuous way of jumping Senor Aragon y Tres Palacios' abandoned claim. If they discovered the lead immediately afterward it would pass for a case of fool's luck, or at least so they hoped, and, riding out a little each day and sitting on the hotel porch with Don Juan the rest of the time, they waited until patience seemed no longer a virtue.

"Don Juan," said De Lancey, taking up the probe at last, "I had a Mexican working for me when we were over in the Sierras—one of your real, old-time workers that had never been spoiled by an education—and he was always talking about 'La Fortuna.' I guess this was the place he meant, but it doesn't look like it—according to him it was a Mexican town. Maybe he's around here now—his name was Mendez."

"Jose Maria Mendez?" inquired Don Juan, who was a living directory of the place. "Ricardo? Pancho? Cruz?"

"Cruz!" cried De Lancey; "that was it!"

"He lives down the river a couple of miles," said Don Juan; "down at Old Fortuna."

"Old Fortuna!" repeated Phil. "I didn't know there was such a place."

"Why, my gracious!" exclaimed Don Juan de Dios, scandalized by such ignorance. "Do you mean to say you have been here three days and never heard about Fortuna Vieja? Why, this isn't Fortuna! This is an American mining camp—the old town is down below.

"That's where this man Aragon, the big Mexican of the country, has his ranch and store. Spanish? Him? Ha, indeed—mitad! He is half Spanish and half Yaqui Indian, but his wife is a pure Spaniard—one of the few in the country. Her father was from Madrid and she is a Villanova—a very beautiful woman in her day, with golden hair and the presence of a queen!

"No, not Irish! My goodness, you Americans think that everybody with red hair is Irish! Why, the most beautiful women in Madrid have chestnut hair as soft as the fur of a dormouse. It is the old Castilian hair, and they are proud of it. The Senora Aragon married beneath her station—it was in the City of Mexico, and she did not know that he was an Indian—but she is a very nice lady for all that and never omits to bow to me when she comes up to take the train. I remember one time—"

"Does Cruz Mendez work for him?" interjected De Lancey desperately.

"No, indeed!" answered Don Juan patiently; "he packs in wood from the hills—but as I was saying—" and from that he went on to tell of the unfailing courtesy of the Senora Aragon to a gentleman whom, whatever his present station might be, she recognized as a member of one of the oldest families in Castile.

De Lancey did not press his inquiries any further, but the next morning, instead of riding back into the hills, he and Bud turned their faces down the canyon to seek out the elusive Mendez. They had, of course, been acting a part for Don Juan, since Kruger had described Old Fortuna and the Senor Aragon with great minuteness.

And now, in the guise of innocent strangers, they rode on down the river, past the concentrator with its multiple tanks, its gliding tramway and mountains of tailings, through the village of Indian houses stuck like dugouts against the barren hill—then along a river bed that oozed with slickings until they came in sight of the town.

La Fortuna was an old town, yet not as old as its name, since two Fortunas before it had been washed away by cloudbursts and replaced by newer dwellings. The settlement itself was some four hundred years old, dating back to the days of the Spanish conquistadores, when it yielded up many muleloads of gold.

The present town was built a little up from the river in the lee of a great ridge of rocks thrust down from the hill and well calculated to turn aside a glut of waters. It was a comfortable huddle of whitewashed adobe buildings set on both sides of a narrow and irregular road—the great trail that led down to the hot country and was worn deep by the pack-trains of centuries.

On the lower side was the ample store and cantina of Don Cipriano, where the thirsty arrieros could get a drink and buy a panoche of sugar without getting down from their mounts. Behind the store were the pole corrals and adobe warehouses and the quarters of the peons, and across the road was the mescal still, where, in huge copper retort and worm, the fiery liquor was distilled from the sugar-laden heads of Yuccas.

This was the town, but the most important building—set back in the shade of mighty cottonwoods and pleasantly aloof from the road—was the residence of Senor Aragon. It was this, in fact, which held the undivided attention of De Lancey as they rode quietly through the village, for he had become accustomed from a long experience in the tropics to look for something elusive, graceful and feminine in houses set back in a garden. Nothing stirred, however, and having good reason to avoid Don Cipriano, they jogged steadily on their way.

"Some house!" observed Phil, with a last hopeful look over his shoulder.

"Uh," assented Bud, as they came to a fork in the road. "Say," he continued, "let's turn off on this trail. Lot of burro tracks going out—expect it's our friend Mr. Mendez."

"All right," said De Lancey absently; "wonder where old Aragon keeps that bee-utiful daughter of his—the one Don Joo-an was telling about. Have to stop on the way back and sample the old man's mescal."

"Nothing doing!" countered Hooker instantly. "Now you heard what I told you—there's two things you leave alone for sixty days—booze and women. After we cinch our title you can get as gay as you please."

"Oo-ee!" piped Phil, "hear the boy talk!" But he said no more of wine and women, for he knew how they do complicate life.

They rode to the east now, following the long, flat footprints of the burros, and by all the landmarks Bud saw that they were heading straight for the old Eagle Tail mine. At Old Fortuna the river turns west and at the same time four canyons came in from the east and south. Of these they had taken the first to the north and it was leading them past all the old workings that Kruger had spoken about. In fact, they were almost at the mine when Hooker swung down suddenly from his horse and motioned Phil to follow.

"There's some burros coming," he said, glancing back significantly; and when the pack-train came by, each animal piled high with broken wood, the two Americans were busily tapping away at a section of country rock. A man and a boy followed behind the animals, gazing with wonder at the strangers, and as Phil bade them a pleasant "Buenos dias!" they came to a halt and stared at their industry in silence. In the interval Phil was pleased to note that the old man had only one eye.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Carlyle and Ceremony.

Thomas Carlyle and his wife were so wedding-frightened that it is sad to think of it. Replying to a letter of his describing his fantastic terrors, she wrote: "For heaven's sake put into a more benignant humor, or the incident will not only wear a very original aspect, but likewise a very heart-breaking one. I see not how I am to go through with it."

WOULD MAKE A POLITICIAN

Little Willie's Capacity for Sticking to One Idea Singularly Like Way of Rabid Partisan.

"The late Adlai E. Stevenson," said a Republican leader of Bloomington, "hadn't, after all much use for politics. He once explained to me why this was.

"He said that party politicians believed their side to be always right, and the other side to be always wrong. Whatever the other side advocated it was hostile and infernal; whatever their own side advocated was holy.

"He said the partisan couldn't understand that you might arrive at the right thing by more ways than one—and thus the partisan was like the urchin whose teacher said:

"'Willie, what does six plus four make?'

"'Eleven.'

"'No. Try again.'

"'Twelve.'

"'No.'

"'Thirteen.'

"'No, no, no. You're just guessing. But why couldn't you have guessed that six plus four makes ten?'

"'Because it don't make ten,' said Willie. 'Five and five makes ten—I remember that.'"

Invitation and Answer.

Mr F. C. Phillips in his book, "My Varied Life," tells how the late Sir George Honeyman, an infamous writer, sent down from the bench to a friend of his, a leading Q. C., a little note. Not able to make head nor tail of it, the barrister scribbled something equally undecipherable upon a half-sheet of note paper, and passed it up to the judge. Sir George looked annoyed, and when the court rose, said to his friend: "What do you mean by this?" I asked you to 'come and dine with me tonight.'" "Yes," said the barrister, "and I replied that I should be extremely glad to do so."

Unreasonable.

George Bernard Shaw is one of the few vegetarians who have remained true to the faith, and in a recent letter to a woman, reproaching her for her fight against the aigrette when she still ate meat, Mr Shaw said:

"The lack of logic prevails everywhere! We call the tiger a ferocious and ravaging beast, but what would you ladies be called if, for example, the lamb chop had a voice?"